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ABSTRACT

Alcohol and drug use among high school and college students was investigated in a sample of suburban high school (N=1,274) and college (N=468) students. Alcohol consumption was very high (78%), with more than half of those using alcohol doing so on at least a weekly basis. While alcohol use was pronounced, 96% of those surveyed reported that alcohol was not a "problem" in their lives. More than half of the total sample reported the use of other drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and amphetamines. (Author)

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Alcohol and Drug Use in a Suburban Sample of College and High School Students

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Running head: Alcohol and Drug Use Among Suburban Youth

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Abstract

A sample of suburban high school (N = 1,274) and college (N = 468) students were surveyed regarding frequency of alcohol and drug use. Alcohol consumption was very high (78%), with more than half of those using alcohol doing so on at least a weekly basis. While alcohol use was pronounced, 96% of those surveyed reported that alcohol was not a "problem" in their life. More than half of the total sample reported the use of other drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and amphetamines. These results suggest extensive alcohol and drug use among suburban youth.

Alcohol and Drug Use in a Suburban Sample of College and High School Students

In spite of extensive treatment programs, alcoholism and drug abuse continues to be a major health problem in the United States today. It appears that primary prevention will be the only truly effective approach to the problem of addictive behavior. The present study presents data regarding the use of addictive substances in a suburban sample of high school and college youth (N = 1,760). If primary prevention is to work, intervention must occur early enough to stop the addictive process. Hopefully, data from the present study will be helpful to health service providers and planners, to educators and to students and their parents.

Experiment 1

Method

Subjects. The subjects were 1,274 high school students who resided in Marin County, California. There were 688 males and 586 females. The mean age was 15.27 years and the mode age was 16 years. The subjects were primarily Caucasian (it is estimated that approximately 15% belonged to minority groups). The social-economic status of most families in Marin County is middle to upper class.

Procedure. All social studies classes in one high school and a random sample of 1st period classes in another high school participated in the study. Teachers were asked to distribute the survey at the beginning of the class period and to allow approximately 15 minutes for subjects to complete all questions. Names of the respondents were not obtained. Unscorable surveys were eliminated prior to statistical preparation.

Results and Discussion

Results are arranged in tabular form with percentage and number (N) given. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Readers are reminded that survey data of this type must be interpreted with caution since error factors are difficult to control.

Table 1

Percentage Who Consumed Alcohol During Preceding Month

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	1,274	68%	32%
Males	688	73%	27%
Females	586	62%	38%

Table 1 presents the results to the question, "Have you consumed alcohol during the preceding month?" The

majority of those questioned indicated that they had consumed alcohol. Male use is higher than female use.

Table 2

Frequency of Alcohol Use

	N	Everyday	4-5 Times a Week	Once a Week	1-3 Times a Month
Total Sample	865	4%	8%	41%	47%
Males	502	5%	10%	43%	42%
Females	363	3%	6%	38%	53%

Over half of those who consumed alcohol indicate that they do so once a week or more.

"Frequency of Alcohol Use" data from one high school sample were further divided by age and sex. Results are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Use by Age and Sex

	N	Everyday	4-5 Times a Week	Once a Week	1-3 Times a Month
Males					
Age					
14	30	0%	13%	33%	53%
15	46	0%	7%	54%	40%
16	65	3%	11%	54%	32%
17	33	6%	12%	66%	16%
	(174)				
Females					
Age					
14	21	0%	0%	57%	43%
15	28	0%	0%	57%	43%
16	37	3%	13%	38%	46%
17	26	8%	8%	58%	26%
	(112)				

Alcohol consumption increases with age. Weekly alcohol use is common (46%-57%) even among 14-year-old subjects. It would be interesting to determine the age alcohol was first used, as well as the first intoxication experience among today's high school students.

Table 4

Percentage of Students Who Have a "Problem" with Alcohol in Their Life

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	1,274	3%	97%
Males	688	3%	97%
Females	586	2%	98%

In Table 4 are the results to the question, "In your opinion, does drinking cause problems in your life?" Most feel that alcohol is not causing "problems." In further research, it will be necessary to specify what is meant by an alcohol or drug related "problem."

Table 5

Family or Friends with Alcohol Problems

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	1,189	17%	83%
Males	625	15%	85%
Females	564	19%	81%

Table 6

Who Has the Alcohol Problem

	N	Mother	Father	Other Relative	Friend	Other
Total Sample	200	33%	35%	10%	11%	10%
Males	93	38%	31%	10%	12%	8%
Females	107	30%	39%	10%	9%	12%

Nearly one fifth of the sample report family or friends with alcohol problems. Over 60% of those who identified such a drinking problem, indicated the parents as the source.

Table 7

Percentage Using Other Drugs During Preceding Month

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	1,274	50%	50%
Males	688	54%	46%
Females	586	45%	55%

The use of drugs other than alcohol is common. Males use other drugs more than do females.

For one high school sample, other drug use data was divided by age and sex. Results are given in Table 8.

Table 8

Percentage Using Other Drugs by Age and Sex

	N	Yes	No
Males			
Age			
14	35	46%	54%
15	52	50%	50%
16	83	57%	43%
17	48	67%	33%
	(218)		
Females			
Age			
14	30	40%	60%
15	49	43%	57%
16	55	51%	49%
17	25	52%	48%
	(159)		

There is a positive correlation between age and drug use for both males and females. Since drug use is already common (46%-40%) by the age of 14 years, research concerning the amount of alcohol and drug use among younger subjects (e.g., ages 10-13) appears to be warranted.

Table 9

What Other Drugs Used and Percentage

Who Used During Preceding Month

	N	Marijuana	Cocaine	Amphetamines	Psychedelics	Tranquilizers	Heroin
Total Sample	1,264	56%	9%	8%	5%	3%	1%
Males	684	58%	9%	6%	5%	3%	2%
Females	580	54%	8%	10%	4%	4%	0%

In Table 9, the percent who used other drugs is given, e.g., 52% (N = 357) reported that they used marijuana during the preceding month. Male drug use is slightly higher than female use except for amphetamines and tranquilizers.

Other drug use was also divided by age and sex for one high school sample. Results are given in Table 10.

Table 10

What Other Drugs Used by Age and Sex

	N	Marijuana	Cocaine	Amphetamines	Psychedelics	Tranquilizers	Heroin
Males							
Age							
14	35	51%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%
15	52	54%	2%	6%	4%	2%	0%
16	83	60%	12%	10%	5%	4%	5%
17	48	58%	10%	8%	6%	2%	2%
	(218)						
Females							
Age							
14	30	50%	0%	10%	0%	3%	0%
15	49	51%	0%	6%	2%	2%	0%
16	55	58%	13%	13%	7%	7%	2%
17	25	52%	16%	12%	4%	4%	0%
	(159)						

Again we see that drug use is positively correlated with increasing age.

Table 11

Are Alcohol/Drugs a Problem in Your School

		Alcohol		Drugs	
	N	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total Sample	1,258	26%	74%	50%	50%
Males	680	25%	75%	49%	51%
Females	578	27%	73%	52%	48%

Although alcohol use is more common, other drugs are seen as more of a problem than is alcohol.

Table 12

What to Do About Alcohol/Drug Problems

	N	Information	Counseling	Something; Not sure what	Nothing	Other
Total	1,155	25%	21%	35%	13%	6%
Males	630	23%	18%	37%	17%	5%
Females	525	27%	25%	33%	9%	6%

Notice the high rating for "not sure what, nothing and other" (54%) and the relatively low rating for "counseling" (21%).

Summary

More than half (68%) of the high school sample (N = 1,274) report using alcohol during the preceding month. Of those who drink, approximately half do so at least once a week. While alcohol use was pronounced, 97% of the sample report no problems associated with alcohol in their life. This result suggests that in future survey research, it will be necessary to specify what is meant by an alcohol/drug related problem. Half of the sample (50%) report the use of other drugs such as marijuana. Alcohol and other drug use among high school youth was found to be positively correlated with increasing age. Other drugs were perceived as a more serious school/social problem than was alcohol. Finally, research concerning alcohol/other drug use among younger subjects (e.g., ages 9-13), age of first intoxication, and the amount (e.g., ounces, number of beers, etc.) of alcohol/other drugs used are suggested.

Experiment 2

Method

Subjects. The subjects were 486 college students in Marin County, California. There were 299 women and 187 men. The mean age was 24.6 years; the mode age was 19 years. The subjects were chiefly Caucasian, living primarily in suburban communities, generally middle to upper economic status.

Procedure. Twenty-five classes were randomly selected to be surveyed. Instructors were requested to allow 10 minutes for students to complete the alcohol-drug use survey. The instructions to the subjects were:

> The purpose of this questionnaire is to get some idea of alcohol and other drug use on campus. Please do not put your name on it. Do be honest and feel free to write any additional comments that seem relevant to you. I really appreciate your help in filling this out. If you have any further questions, I am available at Ext. 258.

Results and Discussion

Results are arranged in tabular form with percentage and number (N) given. Readers are reminded that survey data of this type must be interpreted with caution because error factors cannot be completely controlled.

Table 1

Percentage Who Consumed Alcohol During Preceding Month

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	486	90%	10%
Men	187	93%	7%
Women	299	86%	11%
By Age			
Less than 30 years old	397	90%	10%
30 and above	89	93%	7%
By Age and Sex			
Men: 16-20	100	95%	4%
21-25	43	88%	11%
26-29	20	90%	10%
30	23	96%	4%
Women: 16-20	130	89%	11%
21-25	65	83%	17%
26-29	38	92%	8%
30	66	91%	9%

Table 1 describes the results to question three on the survey: Have you consumed alcohol during the last month? Alcohol abstinence was rare (10%); 93% of the men and 86% of the women had consumed alcohol during the preceding month.

Table 2

Frequency of Alcohol Use

	N	Every-day	4-5 Times Per Week	Once a Week	1-3 Times Month
Total Sample	440	8%	27%	39%	25%
Men	175	11%	31%	43%	14%
Women	265	7%	25%	36%	32%
By Age					
Less than 30	357	6%	23%	43%	27%
30+	83	18%	47%	20%	14%
By Age and Sex					
Men: 16-20	96	4%	26%	50%	20%
21-25	38	13%	37%	39%	11%
26-29	18	22%	17%	50%	11%
30+	22	27%	59%	14%	0%
Women: 16-20	116	4%	13%	42%	41%
21-25	54	9%	30%	28%	33%
26-29	35	3%	29%	51%	17%
30+	60	12%	42%	23%	23%

Frequency of alcohol use is described in Table 2. Generally, frequency of use increases with age. Only 25% drink less than once a week.

Table 3

Is Drinking Causing Problems in Your Life

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	481	4%	96%
Men	182	3%	97%
Women	299	4%	96%
By Age			
Less than 30	392	3%	97%
30+	89	8%	92%
By Age and Sex			
Men: 16-20	100	0%	100%
21-25	43	9%	91%
26-29	17	0%	100%
30+	22	9%	91%
Women: 16-20	130	4%	96%
21-25	65	3%	97%
26-29	38	0%	100%
30+	66	6%	94%

While one third of the sample drink frequently, 96% report no alcohol related problems

Table 4

Percentage Using Other Drugs During Last Month

	N	Yes	No
Total Sample	486	64%	36%
Men	187	67%	33%
Women	299	62%	38%
By Age			
Less than 30	397	69%	31%
30+	89	43%	57%
By Age and Sex			
Men: 16-20	100	67%	33%
21-25	43	65%	35%
26-29	20	90%	10%
30+	23	52%	48%
Women: 16-20	130	70%	30%
21-25	65	63%	37%
26-29	38	71%	29%
30+	66	39%	61%

Here, we see that other drug use is also prevalent, but not to the degree of alcohol use.

Table 5

What Other Drugs Used and Percentage Who Used During Preceding Month

	N	Marijuana	Cocaine	Amphetamines	Psychedelics	Tranquilizers	Heroin
Total Sample	486	56%	20%	12%	7%	7%	2%
Men	187	60%	27%	12%	8%	7%	3%
Women	299	53%	15%	11%	6%	7%	1%
By Age							
Less than 30	397	61%	23%	13%	6%	7%	2%
30+	89	33%	7%	5%	3%	6%	1%
By Age and Sex							
Men: 16-20	100	59%	23%	12%	8%	8%	4%
21-25	43	65%	35%	18%	7%	9%	2%
26-29	20	80%	40%	17%	18%	5%	0%
30+	23	39%	17%	5%	4%	8%	1%
Women: 16-20	130	65%	22%	15%	8%	6%	2%
21-25	65	51%	22%	12%	6%	12%	1%
26-29	38	55%	8%	5%	3%	5%	0%
30+	66	30%	2%	6%	2%	5%	0%

Table 5 describes the percent who use other drugs which are listed, e.g., 56% of the total sample (N = 271) reported that they used marijuana during the last month. The use of drugs other than alcohol decreases with age.

Table 6

Frequency of Other Drug Use

Drug	$\bar{X}$ Number of Times Used During 1 Month Period
Marijuana	11.79
Amphetamines	6.85
Tranquilizers	5.68
Cocaine	5.47
Psychedelics	3.86

Marijuana is the most frequently used drug.

Table 7

Are Alcohol/Drugs a Problem at the College

		Alcohol		Other Drugs	
	N	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total Sample	352	19%	81%	33%	66%
Men	150	15%	85%	30%	70%
Women	202	21%	79%	35%	65%
By Age					
Less than 30	295	18%	82%	33%	66%
30+	57	21%	79%	32%	68%
By Age and Sex					
Men: 16-20	88	14%	86%	31%	69%
21-25	32	19%	81%	31%	69%
26-29	16	9%	91%	20%	80%
30+	14	21%	79%	35%	65%
Women: 16-20	109	25%	75%	35%	65%
21-25	38	21%	79%	44%	56%
26-29	19	5%	95%	20%	80%
30+	36	22%	78%	31%	69%

Finally, Table 7 shows the percentage who feel alcohol and other drugs are a "problem" at the college site. There was more concern about "other drug use" than alcohol use.

Summary

Alcohol consumption among the college sample was very high (90% indicated alcohol use during the preceding month) with more than one third of those using alcohol doing so everyday or 4-5 times a week. While alcohol use was pronounced, 96% of those surveyed reported that alcohol was not a problem in their life. More than half of the total sample reported the use of other drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and amphetamines. These results show that many young adults attending college frequently use addictive substances.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study poses a number of additional research questions. Among these are:

(a) Beyond the number of times used per month, what is the amount of alcohol consumed?

(b) What is the nature of "problems" identified in association with both alcohol and other drug use? For example, are parental and public acceptance the "problems" associated with other drug use?

(c) Is the positive correlation between alcohol use and age, and the negative correlation between other drug use and age, a factor of age, youth culture, or some other variable(s)?

(d) Are those who consume alcohol and/or other drugs daily psychologically and/or physiologically dependent? Are they aware of the potential medical and social "problems" associated with the daily consumption of addictive substances?

Footnotes

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